

Prepare for Calving: Get a Calving Book and Use It

By Kris Ringwall
Extension Beef Specialist
NDSU Extension Service



Every so often, an industry actually faces the future. Often when that happens, not everything is as it is today, so we talk about change with some authority. Talking with authority also means risk, since not all future change actually occurs.

This year, with some authority, it would behoove producers to keep a calving book. Many already do, but the statement is not a simple statement. During the many years of interacting with cow-calf producers, one very sore spot was the implication of keeping individual records of calves. More than once, if the expression “go fly a kite” means anything, most kite stores should be out of kites by now. The sooner they run out of kites, the better, so the industry can get down to the business of filling out a calving book.

During the past years, most calving books have been an excellent vehicle for advertising, and often the date or calendar section was larger than the calf record section. It also is not hard to figure which calving books are designed by committee because they are too big to put in your shirt pocket or they don't have labels for data.

The reality of a calving book is simple. A calving book allows producers to write down the tag number they just put on the calf and record the date of birth as close as possible. For the skeptics, those who think calving books aren't accurate, one simply can assume they never have tagged a calf.

Most calves (not the cow) are easy to tag within 24 hours of birth. After that, you need to be extremely fast, and within 48 hours, forget it, wait for roundup. If the calves are walking around the calving pasture with a tag in the ear, believe me, the tags were placed at birth. Granted, after the birth date and individual tag number are recorded or simply written down, depending on what the producer wants to remember about the calf but doesn't want to convert to memory, the rest of the calving book is filled out.

The more typical data recorded is the mother's tag

number, generally the cow closest to the calf but not always; the sex of the calf; and perhaps a notation on birth weight, calving ease or just miscellaneous comments. The important item is the calf tag number and birth date. Obviously, without the mother's tag number, no performance data can be gathered, but each individual producer ultimately has to make those decisions.

Don't let the extra data get in the way of writing the basic data down. The checklist for age and source verification is extremely short. First, individually identify each calf at birth with a visual tag and if possible, apply the electronic tag at the same time.

Step two, write the number and date in the calving book. That is it. That can be difficult, given the size of many cattle operations and shortage of labor. The next best alternative is to place the tag on the calves when the calves are worked in the spring. If this alternative is used, the electronic identification tag also could be placed in the calf at that time. These calves would then form the core group from which fall marketing groups could be selected and verified.

Still, take the calving book or some book, write down these individual calf tag numbers, and match the visual tag to the electronic tag. The North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association has a calving book that is free to those who request one. The book follows many of the common record practices and certainly assists a producer in preparing for age and source verification in the fall. So, if you don't have a good calving book, let me know and I will send you one.

May you find all your NAIS-approved ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.com on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0286.

Age & Source Verification CHECKLIST

**All records must be legible,
auditable and verifiable.**

- Individually identify animal at birth
(visual or electronic identification)
- Complete calving book